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SOME SHORT

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE LATE

MILITIA BILL:

To which is annexed,

A More Simple and Practical SCHEME.



L O N D O N :

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SOME SHORT

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE LATE

MILITIA BILL.

OUR present critical Situation in regard to public Affairs, engrosses the Attention, and at the same time demands the Assistance of all true *Englishmen*. Yet alarming, as our Circumstances are, too true it is, that very few are so deeply or so *dispassionately* affected therewith as the Nature of the Thing requires. For a Spirit of Indolence, Supineness, and languid Inactivity on one Side; of Faction, Malice, and unsupported Invectives on the other; both alike detrimental to the common Weal, seem to have taken Possession of the far greatest Part of the People of this Island. On such Occasions, it behoves every Man to throw out such Hints as occur to him, for the deliberate Consideration of Parliament, in whose Hands is lodged the Power of providing for the Safety of his *Majesty*, his *Kingdoms*, and his *Subjects*.

The arming the People by establishing a MILITIA, is, undoubtedly, a Means of attaining this great and salutary End. This is acknowledged on all Hands. But under what Regulation, or on what proper Footing it is expedient to put this, or how far we may safely go in this Affair, without altering or endangering our Constitution; has frequently been the Subject of Debate, between Men who have equally seen the Utility of such an Establishment, and wished for it, but have differed in Opinion on the Manner of executing it.

The late Bill for this Purpose, appeared to many of his Majesty's good and loyal Subjects, to be liable to many Objections of the greatest Weight and Moment: And I heartily rejoice it did not pass into a Law; for this, I think, may be truly said of it; Had King *Charles* the First been armed with such a MILITIA Bill, he would have carried his Point, have governed without a Parliament, and our Liberties have been irretrievably lost. It cannot be imagined that any Fears of this Nature, possess me under his present Majesty, who during his long Reign (and for the Happiness of his Subjects, much longer may it be) has had such constant Attention to our Constitution, that the most Clamorous and Factionous, have never been able to point out the least Design in him to infringe it, or encroach upon our Liberties.

When these Objections come to be duly weighed, they will set this Bill in a Light, very different from that in which it has been industriously represented to, and I believe considered by the Bulk of the People.

It strikes one with an *Absurdity* at the first Outset; for such I must term the Supposition, that it would be possible to find such a Number of Officers as were to be appointed by this Bill, who would act and do their Duty without Fee or Reward. Such Men
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are not commonly to be met with in this degenerate Age. Those who are regularly paid to perform this Duty, think of it, in many Instances, as grievous and burthensome. Every Part of it which is not enforced by some Article in the Mutiny Bill, by which the Fear of being broke, and losing their Subsistence, accompanies the Nonperformance, is, I am much afraid, negligently hurried over, at least, it is not undertaken with that Diligence and Alacrity one would wish it were. And to imagine that a public Spirit would immediately rise up, with a Force able to affect this, is, I apprehend, a chimerical Notion, which none but Men, whose warm Hearts mislead their Judgments, can possibly entertain. The Novelty of the Thing, the Smartness of the Dress, and the Gaiety of Manners, not only allowable, but almost thought necessary to Gentlemen of that Profession, would, I make no Doubt, have had Allurements sufficient to have produced many Volunteers in the Service: and for the first Year or two, all might have gone well. But when this Duty should have come to be repeated, in *bad Weather*, at the Time of a neighbouring *Cock-Match*, or *Horse-Race*; or when any other Scene of Pleasure should have invited these Military Gentlemen to any other Part of the Country, it would in all human Probability, like all other Things, frequently repeated, have become at first *dull*, then *irksome*, and at last have been thought *intolerable*.

But supposing I should be so happy as to find myself mistaken in this Point, and that a truly laudable Spirit should break out in this Crisis, and should influence a competent Number of young Men, to make a Tender of their Service to their Country gratis, who is to appoint these Officers? Is it not the Lord Lieutenant of each County; an Officer of great Trust and Honour, and usually of great Property, nominated by the *Crown*, and removeable at *pleasure*? Their Office and Property already gives them great Weight in Elections of all sorts. May not this Accession of Power lodged in their Hands, at the Discretion of the Crown, enable them to make use of an *undue Influence* in all such Elections; by granting these Commissions either as Rewards to their Electioneering Friends, or as Punishments to their Opposers, in which ever Light they may happen to be considered hereafter? For it is very possible that at different Periods of Time, they may appear in these two directly opposite Views. May not the Son of some managing Attorney of a Borough, who has acquired a Qualification by such Management, be gratified with a Commission of Captain, while the Son of a Gentleman of an ancient Family in the County, though of less electioneering Use, obtains only that of a Lieutenant or Ensign? Nay, is not this likely to happen; and if it should happen, where lies the Redress?

This naturally leads to another Objection, which is the unavoidable Heart-burnings, Animosities, and Feuds, which must inevitably be produced in a Neighbourhood, to the utter Destruction of that Hospitality and Good-will, which is still left alive amongst us. The Partiality of every Man towards himself and his own Family is so great, that every Preference, whether truly so or not, will be deemed an unjust One. A Man who does not foresee this necessary bad Consequence, is short-sighted indeed.

If we follow this Militia, thus Officer'd, into the Field when they enter upon Service, another Objection will arise, at least as great as either of the former. I believe it will be readily granted me, by the most zealous Advocates for a Militia, and the most sanguine Expectants of its Use, that they do not wish to see this Country depend for its Defence on such a Militia only, when commanded by Officers, every one of which, the Colonel only excepted, must necessarily be void of all Experience (and God grant they may always remain so, as they are not to gain it but in their own COUNTRY:) Men, whose Qualifications for their Rank in their respective Commands depend on the Use they have been of in Elections, or, at the best, on their Patrimony. I hope there are but few Men, such Enemies to their Country, as to desire to risque its Safety, in Case of an Attack, in such Hands solely; without the Assistance of some *veteran*, *regular*, and *well-disciplined* Troops. We must suppose them then acting in Concert with such Troops. Now it is known to every Man the least conversant in Military Affairs, that in all Detachments, in short, in Service of all Kinds, each Officer takes the Command according to his *Rank* in the Army; and not at all according to his *Abilities* or *Experience*: It must unavoidably happen, that on many Occasions, indeed on the relieving every Guard which is relieved by Detachments, that Officers of the regular Troops, and of the Militia, must mount Guards, and do all other Duties in the same Parties. Let us now put the Case, that a Lieutenant-Colonel, and some Captains of the Militia, are on the same Party with a Lieutenant of an old Regiment

ment, who perhaps laid out his whole Fortune at the first in the Purchase of a Pair of Colours, which he has gallantly and with Honour defended at *Dettingen*, *Fontenoy*, *La Felt*, and *Rocroy*, who has equal Merit with the many brave Companions he has seen fall by his Side; and who by their Misfortune, his own long Service, and by encountering many Hardships and Dangers, has got this poor Step. By the Military Law this brave Man is obliged to be subject to the Command of every such Officer of superior Rank, who has never seen any Service, and who perhaps has not served as many Months as he has Years. Would not this be a hard Case? Let any Man lay his Hand on his Heart, and say honestly, whether he could bear this patiently without murmuring? And if such Things as must every Day occur, should in process of Time, create *Ill-Blood* between the Officers of the respective Corps; how FATAL might the Consequence be? at least, the foreboding of what may happen is shocking to a confederate Mind.

The foregoing Objections regard the Officers only; there remains one which relates to the private Men, and through them becomes the Concern of the whole Kingdom. I mean the Loss of Labour which the Nation must sustain by the Men's Attendance at the Rendezvous. The general One in Summer may, in some Counties, be three Days March from the remotest Part of the County, one it must be from most Parts, which with the Days Exercise, and Return home, makes in one Case three Days; in the other a whole Weeks loss of Labour in Summer-Time, when Hands are most wanted. If to this you add, the Loitering of the Men in their Way home, when they have their Pay to spend with their Comrades on the Road, and then compute this on seventy Thousand Men, it will become such a Grievance as will be severely felt in this Country of Trade, Agriculture, and Manufactures. It would be one Step towards converting us from a *Trading* to a *Military* Nation; which God forbid. And which I will do those Gentlemen, who so warmly espoused this Militia Bill, the Justice to acknowledge, I believe was far from their Intention.

Thus stood the late Militia Bill, and happy it was for this Country, it did not become a Law; for if it had once pass'd, however inconvenient it might hereafter have been found, it would have been a Law of such a Nature as would not easily have been repealed.

But though the passing this Bill was not expedient, it by no means follows from thence, that no Militia can take Place in this Country. On the contrary, there is a Scheme, planned by a noble Lord, which I have often heard mentioned, and as often wished to see published, as it is liable to none of these Objections, and will, in a course of Years, teach the whole Nation the Use of Fire-Arms, and answer all the Purposes desired: and which, perhaps, is the most that can be done consistently with our Safety. For our Constitution, good as it is, has some Peculiarities in it, which will always render it very difficult to throw any considerable additional Power on any Part of it, without thereby risking as great consequential Evils, as those it was intended to remove. And I am fully persuaded, that the more any Man considers and reflects on this, without *Passion* or *Favour* to any Party, which may now, or at any other Time, divide us, the more strongly he will be convinced of the Truth of what I say.

And now, as the Word is given out, as the most extraordinary (I had almost said unconstitutional) Letter, which ever appeared from a private Man, has been circulated thro' this Kingdom; and as the Voice of the People, testified by repeated Addresses to the Throne from all Parts, cries aloud for a Militia; I could no longer refrain from shewing them the Inconveniences and dangerous Consequences attending the late Bill, and pointing out to them such a Militia as will, in a better Manner, do all that they want to have done. And if by this, I can in the least contribute towards calming the Minds, and reconciling the Opinions of the People, I have that Confidence in the known laudable Zeal of the noble Author, that I shall not only stand excused, but have his Thanks for making it public.

It is proposed, that every Man in the Island of *Great Britain* (and, if thought expedient, in *Ireland*) from the Age of Eighteen to that of Forty, may have the Liberty to enter themselves in their own Parish, in a Book to be kept for that Purpose, as a Militia-Man.

That every Man so registered, shall have a uniform Coat and Hat with a Cockade, provided for him at the public Expence, in which he shall be obliged, under some small Penalty, to appear at Church every *Sunday*.

That every registered Militia-Man, shall on the *Sunday*, after Service, be taught the Use of the Musket and Bayonet, and the manual Exercise thereof, and to be able to range themselves in one or three Lines, to march, and to perform their Motions together.

That

That the Out-Pensioners of *Chelſea* Hoſpital, and all Soldiers to be hereafter diſcharged, ſhall be ſent to their reſpective Pariſhes, or otherwiſe diſtributed throughout the Kingdom, to be the Maſters, to teach the Militia the ſaid Exerciſe.

That the ſaid Militia ſhall be exerciſed in their own Pariſh, or if that is very ſmall and other ſmall Pariſhes ſo ſurround it, that a convenient Place can be found for the Exerciſe of two or more ſuch ſmall Pariſhes, which ſhall not be above two meaſured Miles from the Church of each Pariſh, in ſuch Caſe it ſhall be allowed to unite ſuch Pariſhes: And if any Pariſh is ſo large, that no convenient Place can be found, but what will be above three Miles from ſome Part thereof, in ſuch Caſes it ſhall be allowed to divide ſuch Pariſh, for the weekly *Sunday's* Exerciſe.

That each Man have Six-pence paid him, for his Attendance on the *Sunday's* Exerciſe.

That a Liſt of ſuch regiſtered Men be ſent from each reſpective Pariſh to the War-Office, and that Arms be delivered from the Board of Ordnance, to the Miniſter and Church-Wardens of each Pariſh to be by them kept carefully in the Veſtry-Room, or ſome convenient dry Place, for which they are to be accountable.

That on any Occaſion, when the Government want an Encreaſe of the Army, it ſhall be augmented in the manner following: The regiſtered Men ſhall be ſummoned, and if any Volunteers offer to liſt for any Number of Years not leſs than four, they ſhall be liſted regularly for ſuch Term, and ſent up as Recruits for the Army. And if no Volunteers, or not a ſufficient Number offer, then thoſe who do not offer ſhall draw Lots in this Manner: Suppoſe the whole Number of regiſtered Men to be One hundred Thouſand, and the Government want to raiſe Twenty Thouſand Men; every fifth Man ſhall be obliged to ſerve by Lot. The Men on whom the Lots ſhall fall, ſhall again draw Lots, one Fifth ſhall be obliged to liſt for three Years, another Fifth for four Years, another for five, and another for ſix, and the remaining Fifth for ſeven Years. The Men diſcharged at the End of their reſpective Terms, ſhall be replaced out of thoſe who have not yet ſerved, till the Whole have thus taken their Turn of Service. The Men who are thus liſted, to replace the diſcharged Men, ſhall be liſted for five Years certain; ſo that after the firſt three Years, one fifth Part will every Year be new Men, and a conſtant Rotation of five Years Service, will take Place regularly.

By theſe Means, the Whole will in the Courſe of a few Years be regularly diſciplined; the Government will have it in their Power to raiſe any Number of Men, who will be ſo far advanced as Recruits as to be perfect Maſters of the manual Exerciſe, before they come to be entered in the Army; when entered, will preſently be as regular Troops as any in his Maſteſty's Service; and, with deference be it ſpoken, more *uſeful* than any Militia can be without the bad Conſequences attending all Militias ſerving as ſuch in this Country. And to compleat all, the Expence will be very moderate.

It is here ſuppoſed, that the Advantages of the Coat, Hat, and 1*l.* 6*s.* per ann. for the *Sundays* Exerciſe, will be ſufficient to influence a competent Number to enter voluntarily, and oblige themſelves to ſerve for three, four, five, ſix, or ſeven Years in their Turns. If it ſhould prove otherwiſe, ſome ſmall Encouragement and Indulgencies from their Pariſhes may poſſibly effect it: at the worſt, Pariſhes may be compelled to find their reſpective Quota's. But *Compulſion* ſhould never be uſed when the Buſineſs can be done without it.

PUBLICUS.

